# ARSOF Logistics Transformation

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*The act of building the logistics infrastructure during Desert Shield created an atmosphere of domination and a sense of inevitable defeat among the Iraqis before the shooting war began.*
—BG Robert H. Scales, Jr.[1]

DURING OPERATIONS Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom, the Army awed the world with its ability to move an incredible volume of assets and get there first with the most. The Army's logistics focus was, and is, on volume.

By contrast, Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) struggled to develop efficient logistics mechanisms. Lessons learned highlight the need for restructuring. ARSOF arrive on the battlefield before echelons above corps (EAC) assets are in place and frequently remain after they depart.[2] ARSOF are often dispersed over wide areas and in small numbers. Even with EAC units in place, ARSOF requisitions can be lost in the sea of other Army requirements or delayed in multiple distribution nodes. Civil affairs (CA) and psychological operations (PSYOP) units attached to conventional forces are at the mercy of local command logistics priorities and unfamiliar processes.[3]

When the Army is the executive agent for base operations support and is responsible for supporting base tenants, the old cliché that, for supply, a soldier is a soldier no longer applies.[4] Sometimes a soldier is an airman or a sailor in an ARSOF-led combined and joint special operations task force (CJSOTF).

When another service is the executive agent, the opposite is true. The inflexible nature of the joint operational planning and execution system and limitations on intertheater airlift assets add to ARSOF problems, which creates a unique planning challenge: to coordinate Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) and Army Service component command responsibilities. The ARSOF logistics challenge is distribution.

The panacea of a distributed combat service support system and aerial supply and host-nation support/contingency contracting is not suited for all situations. These approaches have long been the staple of smaller-scale unconventional warfare missions, but different environments require different support mechanisms. U.S. Air Force (USAF) Special Operations Command (SOC) and Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) penetration platforms are not designed for routine daily supply missions.[5]

Compounding the problems faced by special operations forces (SOF) before the main battle and during counterinsurgency operations, the USAF simply will not fly supply missions if there is any threat.[6] Host-nation support and contingency contracting are ineffective when an impending conflict causes the populace to hoard supplies or when the campaign degrades sources and routes of civil supply to the region.

Contracted support also requires local security. Contractors might be unwilling to work in areas where indigenous forces provide security and where coalition forces might be reluctant to allow ARSOF-supported indigenous forces inside their security umbrella. Lessons learned from recent conflicts tell us that the Army's logistics architecture must transform to support ARSOF before, during, and after an operation.

Transformation of SOF logistics needs to address training, distribution, and coordination. The ARSOF must develop—

- A system that provides training for logistics planners and executors.
- A distribution system that assures priority, timeliness, and accountability.
- An integrated coordination function that ensures warfighters receive effective support from the appropriate component.

SOF imperatives apply to each of the battlefield operating systems that support SOF units. According to joint doctrine, logistical support of deployed SOF is the responsibility of the service components.[7]

Thus, SOF logistics must interface with existing service systems. A critical component of this process is the statement of requirements (SOR) for exercises, operations, and contingencies. Properly trained logistics staffs prepare SORs early during the planning phase of operations; the theater SOC validates them; and the service component fills them. The full military decisionmaking process is necessary to prepare a thorough SOR.[8] There is no cookie cutter.

Improperly staffed group or CA brigade and battalion logistics cells might not be able to execute future and current plans and simultaneously perform current operations functions required to support an Army special operations task force (ARSOTF), joint special operations task force (JSOTF), or larger CJSOTF. Failure to predict requirements places SOF on the field of battle in competition for resources with service component subordinate elements. Lack of training in service logistics planning, processes, and automation complicates the resolution of emerging requirements.[9]

The current SOF logistics architecture is a series of patches. Because of downsizing and lessons learned during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) created the Special Operations Support Battalion (Airborne) and Special Operations Support Command (SOSCOM) (Airborne).[10] The late arrival of EAC support units on the battlefield required a direct-support (DS) capability until EAC assets were capable.[11] Lessons learned during Operation Enduring Freedom demonstrate the difficulties inherent in transitioning support responsibilities while in contact. Transferring responsibility to an EAC unit disrupts SOF support. When SOSCOM examined the reallocation of assets to other missions, it discovered shortages in deployed organic support.[12] Lessons learned during Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrate the difficulties inherent in sustaining SOF organizational support in garrison without augmentation when group support companies are fully deployed.[13]

The operational tenet that forces should train as they fight requires SOF planners to have an in-depth knowledge of service component logistical assets and processes. They must also ensure that Army National Guard (ARNG) and Army Reserve (USAR) SOF are fully fielded with the latest equipment.[14] Training as they would fight is challenging for organizations with large ARNG or USAR elements. Units should work habitually in garrison with a DS slice. When SOSCOM's ARSOF subject matter expertise assures low-density logistics specialty training and provides a DS slice to units, it reduces the adjustments required during crises. Trained planners and predictable organic and DS assets would be at hand.

## A Special Operations Distribution System

The services are responsible for logistical support of SOF. Navy and USAF SOF missions place SOF near their logistics support hubs at the beginning of any conflict, but this is not the case with ARSOF; AFSOF attached to ARSOF; or Navy SOF with long-duration, landbound missions. To coordinate Army logistics support, landbound SOF must rely on the ARSOTF to which they are attached or on the TSOC.

When EAC units designated to support SOF are not available early in the fight, local purchase or aerial supply cannot reliably fill the void. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the CJSOTF-North planned to rely on these sources augmented by support from U.S. Army Europe units based in Turkey. The Turkey option dried up early, and hoarding of and bombing Iraqi sources limited local purchase reliability. With almost 200 C-17 loads deployed to a European launch base, the CJSOTF was forced to use 4 to 6 MC-130 loads per evening to infiltrate and supply the force.

Once the EAC is in place, the problems have only just begun. The Army moves large volumes of supplies with a distribution system geared to many echelons and distribution centers that progressively support forward units. Significant misallocation of supplies occurs at each step forward as unit "expeditors" ensure their unit needs are met. Time is lost when pallets change content and await full loads for each echelon. Visibility is lost when the load moves from one convoy to several at each forward node. USASOC G4 visits to the U.S. Central Command area of operations during Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom documented these issues.[15]

The focus of Army logistics remains large general purpose force (GPF) formations. The GPF command structure sets priority for supply. CA units' needs were often an afterthought. If an attached CA asset requested body armor and the armor arrived at the higher headquarters distribution point, that headquarters might send the items to infantry units. The same applies to commodities like bottled water or uniforms and other items that are Army-common items. The TSOC, a one-star subunified command, competes with the GPF main effort. A separate SOF distribution process could ensure prioritization of even Army common support.

Emerging SOF requirements require the intervention of SOSCOM and SOC if the assets are to arrive in time to be of use. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, transloading added about 5 extra days of administrative coordination and palletization. Combined Forces Land Component Command transporters have recommended that units try to ship pure

pallets to avoid the accumulation of assets in distribution centers, which would reduce the need to take apart pallets to consolidate loads, thus shaving days from the transportation timeline.[16]

Consolidating SOF pallets at the point of origin could reduce flow time. While costing some time up front, this would greatly reduce the amount of time at each echelon of the distribution system. In unique situations, SOC could arrange transportation directly to SOF units.

The current process of sequential, echeloned distribution mixes SOF unit supplies with those of other units serviced by the same distribution nodes, which results in a loss of accountability and provides opportunities for expeditors to misroute supplies. In short, in-transit visibility and accountability of SOF supplies can be lost as pallets are broken down and rebuilt. SOF pallets should be monitored and secured at critical distribution nodes.

A SOF distribution system is required to piggyback existing distribution nodes only as needed and maintain asset visibility to ensure prioritization, timeliness, and accountability. The relatively low volume of requirements would not overburden existing infrastructures. When EAC services and supplies are available forward in theater, the TSOC could manage the process by coordinating with land, naval, and air component commands to reduce demand on the ARSOF distribution network.

## Coordinate Validated Requirements

The keys to responsive support are an efficient coordination chain and detailed mission planning. Units cannot expect to be assigned support. Dedicated support is responsive to the owner, but it wastes capability. Fire support is never tasked to discharge a specific number of guns. Instead, it is given the target. Logisticians should receive a similar general requirement to fill. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, CJSOTF-North requested C-17 transport aircraft and was consistently asked, "What do you want moved and when?" An Army transportation unit will ask the same question but will not hand over the asset. The trucks and operators cannot be spared during low-usage periods when they could support non-SOF units. The TSOC might even need to reallocate DS assets between JSOTFs during the fight to maximize their usage rates.

The current patchwork SOF logistics architecture evolved without efficient coordination. Before Operation Desert Shield, theater Army special operations support commands (TASOSCs) existed to support deployed ARSOF.[17] Because they were ineffective, with deployed group headquarters fulfilling the doctrinal role, the TASOSCs were stripped to staff SOSCOMs. The remaining elements became theater-unique special operations theater support elements (SOTSE). In a 1995 memorandum of agreement (MOA), U.S. Army Special Operations Command provided a SOTSE to the Central Army as a logistics staff directorate to help U.S. Army Central Command (ARCENT) coordinate Title 10 support to deployed ARSOF. (Note that, semantically at least, the SOTSE does not get support for ARSOF.)[18]

In this well-meant attempt to support deployed SOF, after they had been provided to the TSOC, the Special Operations Theater Support Element-Central Army (SOTSE-CENT) was under the command of SOSCOM and the administrative control of ARCENT. The rating chain at the time, however, lay with the U.S. Army Central Command logistics staff. The SOTSE-CENT has been both praised for fixing local, emerging problems and criticized for not being responsive to TSOC and group needs. Given the MOA, this was understandable. But the question remains: How do deployed ARSOF get responsive support from the Army Service component?

The coordination chain must become more efficient. Maneuver units do not own close air support (CAS) aircraft, but they coordinate timely CAS support. Artillery support has become quite sophisticated in a supporting relationship. Fire support architecture places coordination elements near decisionmakers.[19] The TSOC, which is the requirements validator and mission-tasker for logistics, tasks a force-provider to deploy units and assets. Once deployed, unit support requests, in theory, are screened and filled only on TSOC approval. The support coordination is between the TSOC and the service component. Therefore, the force provider, USASOC, is an unnecessary link in the chain. The logistics coordination cell should be part of a larger TSOC component-to-component coordination package. Responsibility for this coordination rests with the TSOC, however it is accomplished.[20]

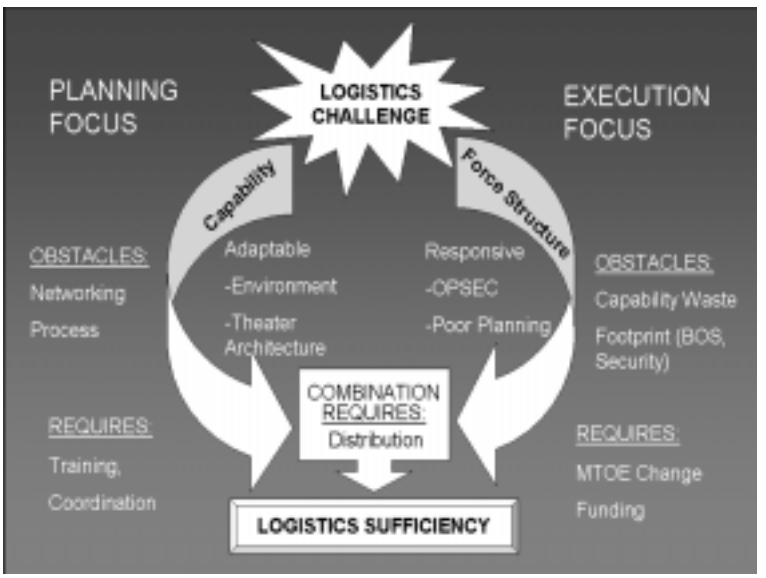
Proper planning by trained staffs for appropriate deployment orders and command and support relationships is critical to avoiding gaps in logistical coverage. ARSOF attached directly to Theater Army units, like CA and PSYOP assets under some scenarios, should require no coordination. It defies imagination that an armor battalion attached to an infantry division would have a liaison cell from forces command or division support command at Theater Army to ensure it received resources.

Distribution and training remain problems for attached ARSOF, but effective training resolves the coordination requirement, and the gaining unit is within its rights to prioritize support to attached elements. A force provider exceeds its authority when it seeks to influence operational resource allocation. On the other hand, when ARSOF are under the operational or tactical control of Army or other ser-

vice component forces, logistical responsibility remains with the parent unit (combatant command, the TSOC, or higher headquarters).[21] Both parent and gaining units must understand the logistical implications of a command or support relationship.

## The Way Ahead

Any SOF logistics transformation must improve training, distribution, and coordination functions. An effective training infrastructure will improve planning and integration with Army logistics systems and processes at all echelons and across the full spectrum of ARSOF units. A SOF-unique distribution system will ensure priority, timeliness, and accountability before, during, and after the presence of EAC (or transformed sustainment brigade) assets on the battlefield. A coordination architecture focused on warfighters, with appropriate command and support relationships, will create an efficient coordination chain that provides responsive support to deployed ARSOF.




There are two paths to logistical sufficiency. A force can enhance its ability to tap into a capability, or it can increase its organic force structure. Effective training, distribution, and coordination enhance access to a capability, creating a smaller logistics footprint and optimizing allocation of resources. Constructing organic capabilities for all environments and in-theater logistics maturities is impossible. Enhancing the ability to tap into a capability does not preclude combining the two paths. An organic force structure ensures availability of support during all phases of the operation and reacts to requirements when information compartmentalization degrades coordination time beyond feasible responsiveness. The force-structure approach advocated by Colonel Jorge Rodriguez in "What is Missing in ARSOF Logistics?" has merit, but it does not maximize the ability to tap into existing capabilities the Army provides or address coordination issues fundamental to Army logistics transformation.[22]

Logistical transformation must address weighting one of the two paths to sufficiency. The figure shows the two paths branching away from the problem toward either the execution or planning attractor. A combination approach, with the main effort being capability access and force structure changes to enhance theater distribution or coordination, is the best approach to the logistics challenges facing ARSOF. The capability-access path is highly adaptable and can be tailored to any environment, theater, or regional logistical maturity. However, refined and integrated networking must exist, and this does not solve distribution priority, timeliness, or accountability problems. If a request for support is processed inefficiently, the infrastructure cannot react. To resolve these difficulties, the Army must focus on training and coordination systems. Creating logistics coordination elements or asset visibility/control teams will require some organic force structure.

The force structure path is more responsive to organizational requirements and can alleviate the effect of poor planning or foresight and reduce the effect of information compartmentalization or operations security concerns. However, this runs the risk that logistics assets will not be fully exploited, and the parent organization gains full responsibility for the security and logistical support of its logistics assets. The parent organization must not only receive support, but deliver it.

When we add to the organic support force structure, we multiply demand for support. Creating an organization capable of doing this requires changes to the tables of organization and equipment and significant resources. Once these changes are made, the resulting organizations must be fully deployed and optimized.

No better time exists than now to reform SOF logistics to maximize efficiency in the use of scarce assets. USASOC can reorganize to provide the training infrastructure and retain flexibility in allocating DS assets. SOSCOM can help the Army's JFK Special Warfare Center with doctrinal development and support a SOF distribution system in-theater.

The SOSCOM vision, addressing both capability and force structure pathways, is a great starting point. The TSOC can accept responsibility for component command logistics coordination elements.

(The parallels to fire support coordination elements are intentional.) We must be aware of the effect of advances in Army logistics, such as the Headquarters Distribution Company in the Stryker Brigade Combat Team.[23] We must also remember past solutions that might be modified to apply today, such as the light infantry forward area support coordinator of the mid-1980s.[24]

To transform, we must connect logisticians, modernize theater distribution, improve force-reception capabilities, and integrate the supply chain.[25] As the Army faces issues of training, distribution, and coordination, ARSOF logistics are on the cutting edge of the Army's Transformation. With so many stakeholders, this effort will require a comprehensive, holistic approach including SOCOM, TSOC, and Theater Armies, as well as SOC and its subordinate commands. ***MR***

*Since we submitted this article, the Army logistics process's reengineering has advanced, terminology has changed, and future architecture has gained greater clarity. We stand by the thesis that the focus of ARSOF logistics transformation should be training, distribution, and coordination—Authors' note.*

## NOTES

1. BG Robert H. Scales, Jr., *Certain Victory: The U.S. Army in the Gulf War* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 1993), 376.
2. Echelons above corps support assets are normally apportioned to support a strategic asset like special operations forces. This gap in support was highlighted in several after-action reports of the conflict. See COL Donald W. Betts, "Logistical Support of Special Operations Forces During Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm," Individual Study Project, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 3 April 1992, 27.
3. Special Operations Theater Support Element, Central Army (SOTSE-CENT), Memorandum, Subject: Trip Report, 1-2, 22 September 2003. BG Scott G. West, Combined Joint Task Force 7 (CJTF-7), Chief of Logistics (C4) and LTC Tony Meyer, 352d Civil Affairs Command (CACOM) S4, highlighted these concerns about civil affairs (CA) support during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).
4. Joint Publication (JP) 4-0, *Doctrine for Logistics Support of Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 6 April 2000), chap. 5, sec. 4(a), leaves room for interpretation as to service funding but not the responsibility for the functions.
5. During the early phases of OIF, COL O.G. Mannon, Deputy Commander, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (CJSOTF-N), highlighted how supply runs affected penetrator maintenance and special limitations on cargo capacity.
6. U.S. Air Force, Central Command, required that the approach into the Bashur landing zone be walked to the airfield for several kilometers to ensure no man-portable air defense systems were in the vicinity. CIA-contracted IL-76 aircraft landed without this requirement.
7. JP 0-2, *Unified Action Armed Forces* (Washington, DC: GPO, 10 July 2001), chap. 5, sec. A, para. 1(c); JP 4-0, *Doctrine for Logistics Support of Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 6 April 2000), chap. 1, sec. 2(d); JP 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 17 April 1998), chap. 5, sec. 5a; JP 3-05.1, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 19 December 2001), chap. VII, 1.
8. U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 101-5, *Staff Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 31 May 97), app. C; FM 100-25, *Doctrine for Army Special Operations Forces* (Washington, DC: GPO, August 1999), chap. 7 and app. A; LTC Philip E. Bradford et al., "Logistics for Deployed Army Special Operations Forces: A Pathway to Support," *Special Warfare, The Professional Bulletin of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School* 9, 3 (August 1996): 38-43.
9. Meyer and LTC George McGuire, logistics officers for the 352d CACOM and the 358th CACOM, interview by author, Camp Doha, Kuwait, November 2003. These officers highlighted the lack of recently trained logistics personnel in CA units and the lack of fielding of Unit Level Logistics Systems (ULLSs) within U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command reserve units.
10. COL Mark Rosengard, Special Operations Theater Support Element, Europe, E-mail to author, 20 January 2004. Rosengard, a former executive officer of Special Operations Support Command (SOSCOM), indicated that SOSCOM was created as a table of distribution and allowances organization primarily to support directed downsizing.
11. Betts, 37.
12. MAJ Derek Jansen, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) desk officer, SOSCOM Logistics Operations, interview by author, September 2003. Shortages in deployed organic support was one of many topics discussed during a trip to the CENTCOM area of operations with Don Ferrara of the U.S. Army, Special Operations Command (USASOC), Assistant Chief of Staff G4 (Logistics).
13. SOTSE-CENT, Memorandum, 22 September 2003, Subject: Trip Report. When questioned by the SOSCOM representatives about the lack of deployed organic capabilities, CJSOTF-Advanced Procurement/Advanced Program (AP) Joint Staff, Logistics (J4), highlighted the awkward position of 5th Special Forces Group, in terms of deploying Group Support Company assets, while the majority of the Group was refitting at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.
14. The ULLS Supply Officer (S4) and ground components should be deployed at the appropriate levels depending on the command relationship and force structure. A requisition must be put into the system at the proper echelon. Situation report comments will not generate a requisition.
15. SOTSE-CENT, Memorandum 22 September 2003, Subject: Trip Report.
16. LTC Michael Boyle, Chief, Transportation Branch, U.S. Army Central Command (ARCENT) C4, interview by author, 24 September 2003. Boyle indicated that transporters throughout the system were recommending the use of pure pallets for high-priority items to reduce the approximately 5-day transition time.
17. Bradford et al., 38.
18. U.S. Army, USASOC and ARCENT Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), 14 April 1995. While attempts to revise this MOA were made in 1997 and 2001, no revision was agreed on. USASOC changes to the SOTSE function, structure, and rating chain have been established de facto, without ARCENT opposition. The negligible role of the theater Army special operations support command (TASOSC) and rationale for SOTSE formation are found in Commander, SOCOM "TASOSC Study Report," 1 June 1992, 17.
19. FM 101-5, 4-26, describes the fire support coordinator's function and role in the decision process.
20. JP 3-05, chap. 5, sec. 5(b), describes the responsibility of the theater special operations command to coordinate with the Army Service Component Command to ensure joint in-theater support.
21. FM 101-5, figs. F-3, F-5.
22. COL Jorge Rodriguez, "What is Missing in ARSOF [Army Special Operations Forces] Logistics," *Army Logistician* (January-February 2004): 7-10. The approach advocated adds forward support companies to the structure of the brigade-level organizations.
23. LTC Rick W. Taylor, "Logistics Risk in the Stryker Brigade Combat Team," *Army Logistician* (January-February 2004): 32-37. Taylor aptly describes the Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) concept of support. While an observer-controller for the SBCT rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, Louisiana, MAJ Mark Hollingsworth, SOTSE-CENT, noticed the opportunity for ARSOF to piggyback off of the Headquarters, Distribution Company, capability when in sector.
24. Boyle, interview by author, 8 January 2004. Boyle served in a Forward Area Support Coordination Office (FASCO) with the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) as a lieutenant. The unit's function was to tailor and coordinate nonorganic assets to support the deployment of resource-challenged light infantry brigades. He recommended that part of a modified FASCO for ARSOF be a multifunction logistics officer as commander, a mobility warrant officer with Joint Operation Planning and Execution System identifiers, a general supply noncommissioned officer, an asset visibility specialist (ULLS, Standard Army Management Information System, Standard Army Retail Supply System, and so on), an ammunition specialist, and a communications package that would assure automated data processing equipment integration with Army processes, all of which have common weaknesses in ARSOF deployments.
25. LTG C.V. Christianson, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army for Logistics (G4), *Logistics Transformation: Adapting to Next Generation Warfare and Technology Change,* quoted in Robert D. Paulus, **"**Delivering logistics readiness to the warfighter: The success of the current and future forces will depend on networking logisticians so they can communicate with each other and with the warfighters they support**,"** *Army Logistician* (January-February 2004): 3-6.

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